

# GASTRONOMICA

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## THE JOURNAL OF CRITICAL FOOD STUDIES

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*Gastronomica* is an international, interdisciplinary journal that focuses on critical studies of food. The journal publishes work that presents new and original research, advances our understanding of the pressing topics, theories, and methods in the world of food, and invites critical debate and commentary across diverse audiences. Submissions from all disciplines and perspectives are welcomed.

The journal prioritizes "translational" work that speaks to multiple audiences. The editor encourages clear writing and organization, with a minimum of specialized jargon.

The journal publishes articles based on original research and analysis, research briefs, critical commentaries and discussions, reviews of books and films, creative reflections, photo-essays, and interviews with key figures in the field. The journal will also consider occasional aesthetic pieces pertaining to food.

Articles should generally not exceed 8,000 words. Each submission should be accompanied by a cover letter with the author's name, address, phone number, and e-mail address, as well as a brief biographical statement, an abstract, and five to six keywords. Research articles to be considered for publication are refereed anonymously, and the author's name should appear only on the cover sheet. Manuscripts must be prepared according to the Chicago Manual of Style, with double-spaced notes at the end of the text. References should be formatted according to the Chicago Style of (Author date, page) for in-text citations and a References Cited list following the end notes.

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# The Market as Mediator: The Corporate Creation of Portuguese Wine

**Abstract:** This article focuses on how market analysis professionals aim to materially and symbolically shape a product like wine. More specifically, I deal with the case of the strategy for marketing Portuguese wines in British and North American markets, outlined by an international multinational consulting firm in 2004. In a market defined by uncertainty, market experts' strategies to turn Portuguese wine into a more effective commodity demanded an adjustment in light of the dominant tendencies that support the wine industry. Before tradition, method, taste, and place, the market should dictate what kind of wines the Portuguese ought to produce. This aim involved a number of articulated levels of specialization and expertise,

from the production phase to the symbolic representation that seeks to influence the experience of taste. This imaginary established a dialogue with the lifestyles and social aspirations of selected target markets. At the same time, these promotional efforts are tools that interfere with consumers' perceptions of space, society, and history, as they propose categories that are used to understand and represent the world.

**Keywords:** wine, Portugal, market studies, national branding, social classes

IN THIS ARTICLE I DEAL with a corporation's market plan designed to qualify a commodity whose value is characterized by uncertainty. The strategy of institutionalization of a national wine brand implies an adjustment between market categories and the social composition of consumers. From production to commercialization, several experts and intermediaries sustain the product's materialization and help to create the most appropriate representations to sell this commodity. If the creation of these representations is aimed firstly at the pursuit of economic profit, the categories that emerge from wine marketing strategies also become broad cognitive categories that produce hegemonic views, defining lifestyles, fashions, aspirations, or creating pastorals (Williams 1973) about the essence of regions and nations.

Although the significant increase in Portuguese wine exports in the period after this study was concluded might indicate the economic success of the marketing strategy, this article will not deal with the political economy behind its implementation. Because they interfere with the activity of different actors in the field, from producers to final consumers, these plans are contentious. Markets are political fields (Fligstein 1996), and multiple contextual interests and conflicting rationalities make this industrial procedure complex and anything but straightforward.<sup>1</sup> The corporation's perspective is not all-powerful, and it is wrong to mistake its intentions with reality. However, without acknowledging

these strategies from above, it is easier to fall into a certain ontological perspective founded on the assumption that agents—from producers to intermediaries and consumers—are autonomous and can individually “choose.” In a way, as Roseberry (1996: 137) argues in his study on coffee, marketing strategies rely on consumers' belief that they are in full control of a situation that the market researchers try to predict, though often unsuccessfully.

A product such as wine—but also the act of its consumption—is embedded in a network of social relations that determines its contextual value but also, within the logics of a capitalist economic market, its monetary value. As Beckett et al. (2014: 1–2) recently emphasized when analyzing the German wine field, wine is a commodity whose monetary value in the market does not depend primarily on production costs and on the consumers' ability to identify its “objective sensory characteristics.” The construction of “quality” in a market defined by uncertainty depends on a process of institutionalization in which the creation of conventions and the strength of symbolic capital plays a crucial role, which means that the level of economic profit depends on the previous accumulation of symbolic capital (*ibid.*, 14).<sup>2</sup> The wine market is not profoundly different from other markets where contextual conventions prevail; as with the art market, “the value of the arts, genres, works and authors depends on the social marks attached to them at any given moment” (Bourdieu 1986: 86). The control over

these classificatory schemes, the “principles of classification, principles of vision and division” (Bourdieu 1998: 8), is the main objective of marketing strategies.

Within the wine field not every agent enjoys the same power to define “quality.” The North American consulting firm Monitor Group was hired by an association of Portuguese producers (ViniPortugal) to design a global strategy for the internationalization of Portuguese wines in the UK and US markets (Monitor 2004). In articulation with the institutional and legislative policies put forth by national and European institutions, the consulting firm’s experts conceived a global plan that aimed to involve most of the agents in the field, from producers to retailers, from specialized wine writers to consumers (*ibid.*). What is revealing in this kind of document is how it displays the process of construction of a certain foodstuff through the articulated involvement of different kinds of knowledge, experts, and institutions. In this sense, the rhetoric present in the report sustains not only a discourse, but also a strategy of market institutionalization. It is this wish for embeddedness and the strategies related to it that this article explores.

In the first section of this article I investigate how the knowledge of the moral and practical economy of the target market becomes the main tool to “materialize” a food commodity. Knowledge about the market allows the targeting of consumers by their current choices, tastes, and aspirations, and the adjusting of the product to meet their desires. In the second section, I follow the stages that lead to the creation of a product well adjusted to consumers’ categories. These stages include price definition, presentation, taste definition, and finally the establishment of narratives of origin that fit consumers’ imagination. In the third and last section I explore the institutionalization strategy, which involves the work of specific experts: retailers, marketers, public relations, journalists, and wine writers.

## The Modernization of Portuguese Wine

The existing strategies for the internationalization of Portuguese wines must be understood in the context of the middle-term marketing strategies developed by international marketing experts more than ten years ago. ViniPortugal, an association of large producers created in 1997 and epitomizing a new trend in wine entrepreneurship (ViniPortugal 2003), played an important role in devising this strategy. For the main Portuguese private associations of producers and state institutions dealing with the agriculture and tourism sectors, joining the European Union was the crucial development that allowed key players to change the Portuguese wine market (Simões 2006). In articulation with the main guidelines of European agricultural policies

for the sector, Portugal had to produce less but better: vineyards had to be improved; new production techniques needed to be developed; the core business had to be focused on foreign markets, rather than on the exhausted internal commercial routes; the number of producers had to be reduced and the strategy of business concentration reinforced (ViniPortugal 2003). Though wine was one of the most relevant agricultural products in Portugal, most of the production was undifferentiated and therefore had a reduced market value (Simões 2006). Export patterns showed that only a few high-value products—especially Port wine—were being marketed.

Portuguese winemakers began trying to diversify their exports. Some producers, more wealthy or knowledgeable, joined the efforts, benefiting from European support and investing in technology as well as human expertise to create exportable table wines, which was not a type of Portuguese export easily found in supermarket or specialized wine stores’ shelves (Domingos 2014; Simões 2006). Widely depicted as the outcome of heroic family entrepreneurship, transformations in the production stages were already linked, however, with broad institutional plans, articulated with the country’s economic policies. Such connections between a strict group of producers and these institutional networks remained almost invisible behind marketing strategies that rely on biographical fictions and reinvented traditions, which were so important in other wine environments, as in the cases of Bordeaux (Ulin 1987) and Champagne (Guy 2007).

It was in this context that the American consulting firm Monitor Group was approached by ViniPortugal to produce a report on Portuguese wines’ marketing strategy in Great Britain and the United States. The Monitor Group is a North American consulting multinational founded in 1983 by Harvard economists Michael Porter and Mark Fuller, who both specialized in the development of a conceptual framework that evaluated the competitive advantages of nations (Porter 1990). Portugal was one of the countries that hired their professional services. In 1994, Porter produced a report on the competitive advantages of the Portuguese economy where he argued that local economic agents and government institutions should direct their efforts at developing the country’s traditional sectors (Porter 1994). These clusters included tourism, textiles, timber, cork, the car industry, the shoe industry, and wine. Following this wide-ranging diagnosis, other sectorial studies were made by the Monitor Group, such as the aforementioned report on the Portuguese wine strategy for the UK and US markets, published in 2004.<sup>3</sup> The Monitor report’s main goal was to provide guidance for wine producers, government experts, and all of the parties involved in wine exports to the UK and US markets (Monitor 2004: 5).



FIGURE 1: *The images of the Douro Valley vineyards, which are commonly used in wine promotions, help to construct the representation of a traditional and idyllic country.*

PHOTO BY MAT'S EYE (FLICKR: THE DOURO VALLEY) [CC BY 2.0 ([HTTP://CREATIVECOMMONS.ORG/LICENSES/BY/2.0](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0))], VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

## The Knowledge of the Market as Mediation: How to Create a Portuguese Wine Category?

Entering into foreign markets depended on a “correct” definition of what Portuguese wine must be. According to the logic followed in this report, from production to promotion, the best version of “Portuguese wine” should be envisioned in accordance with the main characteristics that define target markets. The Monitor’s report recognized that the great majority of consumers did not have enough knowledge about wine (Monitor 2004: 27). In other words, people chose wines in stores on their own, which means they relied on their knowledge of categories of classification and on their own perceptions.

According to this document, the main strategy to sell Portuguese wine in these markets rested on the creation of a “Portuguese wine category” (ibid., 3). In 2003, Portuguese wines in the UK and US markets had a share of 1% (ibid.). Despite the poor results, these two markets represented 23% of the total wine export revenue (ibid., 7). Statistics showed that British and American markets, then the largest buyers of international wines, were open to trying new products, as the increase in New World wine in these regions had recently confirmed (ibid., 7–8).<sup>4</sup> Even though Portugal belonged to the Old World’s wine producing countries, marketing researchers designed a strategy where Portuguese table wines, because they

were rather new in these markets, should follow the successful strategy of countries like Australia. Nonetheless, Portugal could also benefit from proximity to Spain, a wine region that already had a strong presence in local consumption habits (ibid.: 10).

Although the Monitor report is more specific regarding strategies for the British market, there were no major differences between the plans for these two large territories. Both UK and US markets had similar dynamics, the report argued (ibid.: 28). Concepts of local culture and history only seemed to be crucial elements in the development of marketing strategies when they influenced the markets’ morphology. US consumers, for instance, were considered to be more open to wines that provide a narrative on European history.

The shape of the market and the groups of people who, with their different tastes and purchasing power, form this space of economic relations were decisive factors. Therefore the effort of symbolic institutionalization began where conditions were more favorable. Accordingly, in the US market, the state of Florida (Miami) and the city of New York (Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, Long Island, and Westchester) were chosen as the main targets because they were more prone to accepting new products due to their internal cultural diversity and the high number of tourists (ibid., 14). European influence in New York and the Latin American population in



Florida were important assets for Portuguese exports (*ibid.*, 15). Whereas in the US market Portuguese table wines were virtually facing uncharted territory, in the UK market agents and consumers already had some kind of knowledge that created expectations about the wine coming from Portugal. Earlier research proved that British retailers and consumers had negative perceptions about Portuguese wines, which meant that this market was a bigger challenge (*ibid.*, 28).

Arguably, Portuguese wine—and by this I mean table wine—was practically nonexistent in the UK market. Portugal obviously had introduced wines to England, but these were not known under the category “Portugal.” I am referring to the cases here of Port, Madeira, and more recently to a few types of *Vinho Verde* and *Mateus Rosé*. In the UK, Port helped to create a standard of taste. Since the mid-seventeenth century, the UK was the major market for Port, a situation that only changed in the twentieth century (Martins 1990). Like Port, Madeira is a fortified wine popular in the UK, as this wine, produced in the Madeira Islands, has regularly been exported for centuries (Hancock 2009). *Mateus Rosé* has a more recent history. Created in 1942, it became successful in the United States and in Europe due to its light style and creative bottle—features that attracted new wine consumers. Regarding table wines, Portugal’s most lucrative products (*Vinho Verde* and *Rosé*)<sup>5</sup> were being severely harmed by the competition from wines such as Italy’s Pinot Grigio and New Zealand’s Sauvignon Blanc (Monitor 2004: 10). The commercial life of these Portuguese wines was declining, and, more worryingly, they did not convey or promote a strong regional and national commercial identity. Bearing this in mind, market analysis experts advised Portuguese producers, associations, and state institutions to follow the trends dictated by the current state of international wine markets (*ibid.*, 12).

## Categories of Consumers

In the case of coffee in the United States, William Roseberry demonstrated how market segmentation was based on particular representations of class and generations, which were used by producers and marketing experts to capture consumer niches (Roseberry 1996: 124). New types of coffee were created to fit the expected preferences of consumers and their desire to differentiate themselves within a mass market (*ibid.*, 134). This included information on the dominant worldviews and concrete interactions, cognitive structures, and values and aspirations of prospective consumers. Mapping these practical and symbolic spaces, the locus where embedded economic products gain certain meanings, was therefore crucial in increasingly segmented markets.

Based on the accumulated knowledge of the UK market, three main wine consumers’ groups were identified by the Monitor’s research findings. Defined through a class analysis adapted to the features of the local wine market, these groups comprised the idealized consumers whose tastes and aspirations would define, according to the Monitor’s team, the “correct” definition of Portuguese wine. The report claims that, despite their internal differences, these groups were generally male, suggesting that the transformation of the Portuguese category was based on a process of masculinization of consumption. The traditional Portuguese best sellers—*Rosé*, *Vinhos Verdes*—were more linked to women’s tastes (Monitor 2004: 29). Gendered notions of consumption were present in the market analysis. If the category “Portugal” aimed to reach a good price, it had to avoid the association with types of wine that were supposedly driven by female consumption. However, this male drinker who marketers were chasing should not be mistaken with other profiles of male consumers of alcohol, namely the ones who did not fit with the lifestyles to which Portuguese wine had been associated according to the study.

Aside from the gender bias, the idealized consumers were all included in specific strata of the middle and upper middle classes (*ibid.*, 29–30). The first target was the “General Buyer,” a male between the ages of 21 and 29 and between 30 and 39, a professional or a student, inexperienced when it came to wines, single, and who bought mainly in supermarkets. Approximately 1.6 million people fit in this category and were worth £520 million. With minimal wine literacy and in most cases without a previous wine consumption background, these consumers needed to be persuaded to drink wine through a well-selected marketing strategy. The second target, the “Iberian Consumer,” was male, between the ages of 20 and 29, with similar features as the last category but some preference for Spanish and Portuguese wines (160,000 persons were in this category and were worth £53 million). Finally, the third category was the “Connoisseur”: male and female, between the ages of 21 and 40, highly educated and wealthy, with a specific knowledge about wine, a reader of the wine press, and a visitor of fairs who trade mostly in specialized retailers. The consumers in this category did not have a good image of Portuguese wines (1 million persons belonged in this category and were worth £320 million).

For the US market three groups were also identified (*ibid.*, 17). The “Experimentalists” (630,000 persons worth \$310 million) were young men and women, highly educated and with some knowledge about wine. They had never been to Portugal but were willing to try Portuguese wine. The “Wine Appreciators” (318,000 persons worth \$277 million) were wealthy and traveled men. As cosmopolitan wine

connoisseurs they preferred European wines. Finally the “Cautious Enthusiasts” (832,000 persons worth \$166 million) were men and women from different social classes but highly educated. While not being wine experts, they bought New World wine in supermarkets in large quantities and would be willing to try Portuguese wines.

The perceptions, aspirations, and consolidated tastes of these consumer groups, which were identified through market analysis based on surveys conducted among British and American consumers, as well as interviews with distributors and retailers, were crucial to define how Portuguese wine should be produced and selected (ibid., 17). Portuguese wine was to become part of their lives, but it was actually their lifestyles, practices, and worldviews that were initially taken into account to create the wines they would buy. For instance, Portugal was to invest in red wine not because white wine was bad, but because consumers’ perceptions linked Portugal to red wines (ibid., 44). In those days red wines were receiving better critical reviews in magazines like *Wine Challenge* and *Wine Spectator* (ibid., 45). Moreover, the report mentioned that in California—the region that defines US wine trends—full-bodied reds were successfully being produced (ibid., 9). The Portuguese category therefore needed to be based on red wines.

## The Definition of Price and Presentation

To be successful among groups of consumers chosen by their specific social competences and habits, Portuguese wine had to be designed accordingly. It should have a suitable price, a proper presentation, the correct taste, and be able to stimulate the consumers’ imagination.

In the UK, Portuguese producers were to focus on exports of high-value wines, starting with the London market. For that reason, Portugal should not be linked to perceptions of cheap wine. Imagetic links to lower-rate products like *Rosé* (which amounted to 68% of the Portuguese market in England) had to be avoided (Monitor 2004: 3). A similar argument was made regarding Portuguese wines’ Buyers Own Brand (BOB), usually linked to low-cost products. All these second-rate wines could damage the symbolic construction of a unique and quality product (ibid., 31).

Such concerns on the representation of quality were linked to the price definition strategy designed by the Monitor’s report. Market analysis studies revealed that in the case of Portuguese wines, target consumers would be interested in red wines that fit the super-premium category (ibid., 32).<sup>6</sup> A third of British consumers considered that price was the best marker of quality (ibid., 3). Price was one of the most impor-

tant mediators, as it immediately characterized the type of consumers who were idealized by marketing strategies. At the same time, it allowed consumers to choose not only the price range that best suited their material condition, but also the self-perception they had of their lifestyles and the lifestyles they wanted to pursue. Marketing analysts acknowledge that price, as any other market mediator, is articulated with other types of mediation. Consumers learn to link a certain price to the wine’s origin, the bottle’s shape, the images and messages on the label; and in some cases they relate all of this to what they read in newspapers and magazines.

Wine presentation played a crucial role in price definition, and was seen as more important than taste. In the UK studies indicated that presentation was responsible for a £3 variation in price, whereas taste was only responsible for a £1.50 variation (ibid., 52). Regarding the Portuguese strategy, Monitor’s advice was that bottles were to look stern and simple, because these attributes make the wine look expensive and sophisticated; complicated labels, too many colors, and golden elements were to be avoided (ibid., 38). Portuguese producers needed to hire North American designers but most urgently British experts because the problem with Portuguese wine presentation was more severe in Great Britain (ibid., 37).

An incorrect definition of price and an inconsistent label were aspects that could arguably lessen the role of a wine bottle as a lubricant during a social event. Conversely, the correct choice could provide the ontological security that characterizes a well-defined social situation, to use Erving Goffman’s (1959) terminology. These organized frames of meaning should eliminate the common consumers’ insecurity in the process of choosing a wine, a common state of indecision that Demossier (2005) designated as “wine anomie,” therefore conferring legitimacy to a certain product.

## The Definition of Taste

Pressed by the internationalization and segmentation of markets, the development of the wine field progressively depended on the commercial value of regional imaginations. However, the construction of Portuguese wine was not only linked to a process of national imagination. The creation of a good-quality foodstuff also implied transformations in the production stage. Portuguese wines had to be materially produced to fit preexisting tastes and sensory perceptions of the “real” taste of Portuguese wine.

Monitor’s report mentioned that the major problem with Portuguese wines was that they were both too diverse and unique, which meant that they did not fit into existing market



categories. This condition of the wine's materiality confused consumers, as if they lacked a map to properly understand how to place those products within a market where the number of offers flourished. Portuguese wines needed a brand recognizable by a certain number of specificities. Taste was one of the key aspects at stake in this process. If market segmentation was crucial at a certain stage of wine commercialization, too much diversity at an initial stage could be hazardous and disturb consumers. Therefore, the creation of a national trademark should precede any attempt to reach more specialized areas of the wine market.

According to Monitor's report, oenologists needed to have the know-how to adapt the taste of Portuguese wines to the taste limits of the targets' consumption categories.<sup>7</sup> With this goal in mind, Monitor's experts reiterated a suggestion already proposed in previous reports: the creation of a Fine Wines Board (Monitor 2004: 54). In order to be included in a certain price category, Portuguese wines had to fit the conditions defined by the future Fine Wines Board (*ibid.*, 32). Composed of a group of specialists from the US and British markets and also by consumers, this board would make a selection of wine types adjustable to the concept that the Portuguese category demanded. Similar processes of selection happened in other countries before internationalization plans were to be put in practice, such as in Bulgaria (Jung 2014). If, on the one hand, it was a matter of preserving quality, on the other, this "quality" was clearly defined by a certain degree of standardization. This board would propose a new type of certification, based only on the national origin of wine. The Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) system, which is a European Union system of Geographical Indication, could be a good promotional asset, but in terms of production it created a very complex and excessively diverse national *terroir* (West 2013). An official geographical indication (GI Portugal) should be promoted by the new certification (Monitor 2004: 54).

This category was mainly a certification of taste and quality, the final result of a productive selection. When producers dealt with consumers or even retailers, the wine commodity should be classified through more detailed categories (*ibid.*, 21, 55). The creation of the GI Portugal was based on the belief that oenologists could "create," regardless of place and tradition, a Portuguese certified wine using grapes from different regions of the country. This strategy was crucial for production volumes to be high whenever necessary, allowing Portuguese producers to react more swiftly to market demands (*ibid.*, 21, 54).

Monitor's report concluded that a selection of the most "capable" producers had to create "less dry," "smoother wines, less aggressive versions of what already exists" (*ibid.*, 32). It was assumed that the trade of these wines in the UK

and US markets had to represent distinctively Portuguese flavors, which were flawless and lacked any strange or unpleasant taste. Importantly, the word "flaw" does not mean in the context of the report's rationale that something is spoiled, but that something is affecting consumers' standard taste (*ibid.*, 19, 32). To avoid this strangeness, less acidic and fruitier wines had to be chosen over others. Why was this suggested? Because when the report was drafted, there was a major influence of New World wines in the market taste, especially in the preferences of a large group of new buyers (*ibid.*: 32). The market survey prepared by Monitor showed that 20% of British consumers expected Portuguese wine to be fruity like typical New World Wines.<sup>8</sup>

If the first step for internationalization implied the initial recognition of a national wine category, the product's taste should follow market trends. In the Portuguese wine's case, this meant a concrete disconnection between place and taste. This logic was to change when the market showed some interest in more segmented versions of Portuguese wine, where local wine varieties could provide a distinction.

## Narrating Portugal

For the Monitor Group, the Portuguese nation was the symbolic unity through which a general trademark should support a strategy to conquer a commercial space in the international wine market. Recently a number of studies have dealt with processes of food certification based on the distinct characteristics of a product and its production methods (West 2013), most of the times associated with the uniqueness of place (Trubek 2008). Market certification based on the characteristics of place is today at the center of large disputes within the international commercial trade (Barham 2003; West 2013). Studies on GIs have emphasized how producers, associations, and state agencies use the characteristics of place in order to obtain competitive advantages. In some cases certification has been shown to be useful in protecting weaker players in the market, while embedding production in ground-rooted institutions (Barham 2003; Coombe and Aylwin 2011; Jung 2014; Paxson 2010). In other situations, however, official recognitions are co-opted by actors who already have market advantages (Bowen and Zapata 2009; West and Domingos 2012). Some studies demonstrate how the protection of local producers through certification against large international traders sometimes hides the uses of this acknowledgment to locally select the strongest and eliminate the weakest producers (Allaire 1988; Bowen and Zapata 2009; Ulin 1987). Ultimately, the layers of struggles inside a progressively globalized wine market define the concrete effect of market valorization on products, methods, and places (Demossier 2011: 688).

Planned to benefit a group of producers and a sovereign state interested in balancing its international trade, Monitor's report said very little about regional *terroirs* and certifications. However, the strong links between the wine industry and national identity, as shown in the case of France (Barham 2003; Demossier 2010: 132; Ulin 1987: 2, 80), set an historical experience that many other nations tried to follow.

Among the initial requirements needed to generate a market category based upon a national brand was communicating an idea of Portugal to target consumers—a linear narrative of a country composed of several regions. A certain image of the country should be embodied in the wine, creating a homology of meanings between country and product. Provenance stories are part of the national branding process used to add value to the wine (Maguire 2010: 276).<sup>9</sup> The report commissioned by ViniPortugal therefore stressed the importance of having the right discourses, which would become main promotional tropes, reproduced by market intermediaries.

For marketing purposes this representation of wine's place and origin emerges from clients' expectations of cultural and national otherness. The Monitor Group's experts identified the best promotional images, portraying a country that preserves its natural characteristics, with a mild climate, filled with fishermen's villages and endless beaches that are hidden treasures, with a strong culinary tradition and strong and heart-warming wines that refuse to follow European trends (they employ technology but are not industrial); a country that has a lush rural landscape, a warm and welcoming people, festive and relaxed, and whose life is organized around the family (Monitor 2004: 37).

For the US market an emphasis needed to be placed on Portugal's historical and cultural wealth, while for the UK market this was to be replaced by the allusion to a new generation of oenologists (*ibid.*, 2). The estates where the grapes are grown, for instance, are portrayed as if they had been in the same families for centuries (for instance, Quinta da Foz do Arouce, which has a castle called Arouce and is owned by the fourth Duke of "Arouce"). This wine ancestry is far from being the exact truth, as a considerable number of wine-makers are relatively new to the business (Domingos 2014).

Such broad national representations continue to support Portuguese wine marketing strategies, as revealed by the London Annual Tasting of Portuguese Wines, which took place in London on March 5, 2014. Strong images of the countryside, stressing the dialectic between tradition and modernity, promoted a kind of Portuguese exoticism and were conveyed to a middle-class British audience. Most powerful was the aforementioned image of the family business, already

present in the Monitor's report. Wine production was based on family values, which suggested that financial issues were not at stake in the commercial venture; but only love for the land and its products. On the promotional website Wines of Portugal, sponsored by ViniPortugal and the Ministry of Agriculture, the section "A World of Difference" introduces a strong discourse on Portuguese identity.<sup>10</sup>

From Algarve beaches to the breathtaking mountains of the north, Portugal is a land of contrasts. In between lie verdant floodplains, rolling plains and cork forests, wetland reserves. . . . The east is dry and continental, the west milder, ocean-influenced, greener, especially the lush northwest. Today, the country is linked and united as never before by fine new roads—just one sign of the prosperity that has spread across Portugal from the late '80s onwards. But tradition still lies at Portugal's heart. Families spend time together, eat long meals together. Friends enjoy festivals, dancing, fado, café culture and eating out.

This passage suggests how wine promotions had the power to recreate, not just reinforce, hegemonic representations of nation and society; market categories are active agents in the proposal of national and regional "pastorals" adjusted to the aspirations of selected consumers. These images not only represent the outcome of a marketing strategy, but also become powerful tools of social and historical construction.

## Market Intermediaries and the Strategy of Institutionalization

All these initial stages that define the wine's conception were, however, insufficient to create a strong market category. Portuguese wines had to become "real" on retailers' shelves and in consumers' minds. The first association between the product and the selling market was made by the creation of wine categories that could be decoded by the different types of sellers and translated into a commercial language.

In the US market the main commercialization strategy was based on the creation of a classic style. Market research shows that in the United States, consumers conceived of Portuguese wine as an Old World wine, with a classic presentation linked to images of a traditional and old European country (Monitor 2004: 26). In the British case the situation was more complex. Ultimately, Portuguese producers needed to reinvent their wines to make them fit into two market categories (*ibid.*, 33): The first, "Portugal New World," was defined by its new design ("Modern Elegant"), the use of the English language, its international wine varietals, and its fruity taste. This category was closer to new international consumers' preferences: customers who preferred less demanding wines that were advertised in English by the type of



FIGURE 2: During the Wines of Portugal Annual Tasting in London, held on March 5, 2014 at the Royal Horticultural Halls of The Lindley Hall, the sense of distinction that was linked to the consumption of Portuguese wine was well portrayed by the motto “Not Made For All.”

PHOTOGRAPH BY NUNO DOMINGOS © 2014

international wine varietal—a new *lingua franca* of the wine world—and who were attracted by simple bottle designs and labels, typical of Australian brands (ibid., 33). This class of wines was also identifiable by the use of key words that can broadly define the wine’s taste, usually by pairs of opposed words, for instance “fruity/dry.” Market analysis conducted in

the UK revealed that wines included in the “Portugal New World,” category should be sold by British retailers such as Threshers, Unwins, Asda, and Tesco (ibid.). These were basically the traders situated in the lower end of the large retailers’ market, who sell products to a consumer who is traditionally not a wine buyer. These traders offered their customers a less

codified social interaction, where the specific knowledge demanded for connoisseurship was not necessary. In these contexts, price, international wine varietals, and national provenance were abstracted, and basic forms of labeling that allowed an informed choice favored.

The process of national branding was to lead to the creation of a second market category. Named Portugal/Classic, this category was inspired by the Spanish and Italian wines that British consumers were accustomed to finding on supermarket and specialized shops' shelves. Contrary to the first category, the second was defined by its classic image ("Simple Classic"); the label lettering could be written in Portuguese and include the name of the region of origin. Wines in this category could be less sweet and closer to what is considered a more traditional style (i.e., drier and more acidic), while still being slightly fruity. This wine fit high-end retailers, such as Waitrose, Safeway, Sainsbury's, Oddbins, Majestic, and Direct Wines (Monitor 2004: 33). As in other spaces of cultural consumption, like museums and certainly art galleries, in the more specialized wine shops a basic wine literacy is required as a "right of entrance" for beginners (Bourdieu 1986: 272–73). Rather than basic knowledge and sufficient money, customers' credibility demanded an expertise that certified the validity of their choice. If well advertised, these two main Portuguese wine categories could pave the way for other types of wines, like super-premium wines of high quality and *Rosé* premium.

## Market Intermediaries

All in all, the concept of "New Generation" summarized the consulting firm's strategy: Portuguese wine was a combination of the new and the old; it should compete with the New World's wine markets but also have a category closer to more traditional European wines (Monitor 2004: 37). According to the marketing strategy's rationale, the existence of a wine tradition was no longer associated with the idea that Portugal is the place from where cheap and rustic wines originate. Portugal was not a poor country that produced poor wines, but a traditional country that produced classic and innovative wines. The new oenologists were transforming the idea of tradition; in other words, they needed to adjust wines to preexisting market categories.

The Monitor Group's report argued that the plan that defined the establishment of a Portuguese category needed to rely firstly on personal contacts made by traders with key buyers rather than on advertisements. The development of personal networks was a decisive step toward convincing retailers of the advantages of Portuguese wines. Direct links with specialized stores, public relations officers connected to wine magazines

and other specialized press, should be put in place.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the number of promotional agents on the ground would need to be increased. Properly trained, the latter would have to know how to instruct the retailers as they would have to train them on what to say when dealing directly with consumers. Also, according to the report, fifteen main buyers could control the presence of Portuguese wine in the UK market (*ibid.*, 36). These buyers needed to be invited by the industry to come to Portugal. The same went for key wine journalists and critics. In that period, the Euro 2004 football championship held in Portugal was seen as an opportunity to reinforce these initiatives. Retailers and media intermediaries would then be chosen according to their ability to sell a certain kind of product that they would at the same time help to create.

In Britain, the key targets for super-premium wines (£4.99–5.99), the category on which Portuguese producers would need to focus, were specialized shops and higher-end supermarkets like Oddbins, Sainsbury's, Waitrose, and Majestic. According to the report, the retailer's brand gave confidence to consumers and would help put the category in peoples' minds (*ibid.*, 31). Portuguese groceries in London could also be good mediators as they also had English customers (*ibid.*). These mediators were included in the off-trade business and were important because the main target was domestic consumption. However, there were also good opportunities in using the actual places of consumption in the UK and US: restaurant chains, Portuguese restaurants, and Brazilian restaurants, where personal contacts facilitated by the common language would be important as well (*ibid.*).

The report argued that a common vocabulary needed to be created, which could be used when Portuguese producers met personally or via other intermediaries with members of the local wine sectors. This was not a language for the consumer, but a language designed to convince retailers and give clear indications as to the kind of product they would sell. In many ways, these layers of language and discourse were key instruments to reevaluate and rematerialize Portuguese wines. The main elements for the identification of these categories were color, whether the wine was to be consumed with/without food, and a number of identifiers: wine varietal national/international, brand, and region (*ibid.*, 41). Seven groups emerged, but the most important, considering market demand, were "fruity smooth red" and "full red to be consumed with food." Local producers were named as good examples of each of the designated categories. This procedure demonstrates how global marketing policies were based on practices that interlinked the "chosen" agents, among the selected producers who can guarantee the "correct version" of Portuguese wine, with the "right" taste and presentation to be served to the

“right” client, to the retailers willing to accept those commodities in their commercial spaces.

The report included an appendix with contact details for dozens of agents and retailers. In the British case, along with contact addresses, this list included a brief description of the typical customers of some of the retailers: Berry Bros & Rudd’s (wealthy middle-aged men and women), Majestic (wealthy 40-year-old men), Nisa Today (impulse buyers in convenience stores), Waitrose (professionals, middle cadre), Thresher Group (modern singletons, wealthy families), the Unwins Wine Group (suburban men and women from 25–44 years), Virgin Wines (young bachelors with high revenues), and Winecellar & Booze Buster (established groups that use the internet) (Monitor 2004: 56–57). Premiums should be given to the best sellers in specialized shops. Furthermore, the more specialized consumers would have to be approached directly through promotions in wine shops, wine tasting events, and supermarket campaigns (ibid., 36).

## Symbolic Mediators

Other types of intermediaries had the role of giving symbolic meaning to a bottle of Portuguese wine. The triumph of Portugal as a strong wine brand among the more specialized sections of the market depended on the extent to which it could convince these consumers that Portuguese wines were adjustable to their perceptions and wishes, and at the same time could bring something new. According to the Monitor’s plan, PR officers in nonspecialized magazines and papers, namely in lifestyle magazines and in the newspapers’ weekly supplements, had to be persuaded to convey positive messages about Portuguese wines to consumers (Monitor 2004: 36). In addition, these wines should be the topic of at least two or three articles per year in specialized magazines such as *Decanter* and *Drink Business*. Regarding the US strategy, aside from establishing contact with local newspapers (*New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Miami Herald*), marketing experts even advised Portuguese producers to invite “super celebrities” of the wine world, as they could be important to “educate the sector” (ibid., 24–25). Some of these celebrities had the power to increase the wine’s value, particularly if they had some recognized expertise, for instance an oenological expertise.<sup>12</sup> The increasing amount of wine news in the general and specialized press, as Beckert et al. (2014: 5) mention, shows the increasing “relevance of symbolic quality criteria” (taste, aesthetics) in the wine consumers’ market.

*Decanter Magazine* started publishing regular articles on Portuguese wine one year after ViniPortugal was created. The development of *Decanter*’s reviews seems to have followed

the progress of Portuguese wine promotion campaigns and major policies regarding wine in general. Portugal was a new world to discover, full of possibilities but still unorganized in terms of the international market. Criticism against an old decaying system was evident in the 1998 article on *Vinhos Verdes* written by Susy Watkins:

*Vinho Verde* doesn’t age at all well and doesn’t carry a consumer-friendly sell-by date. . . . Now the most basic cheap wines suffer from different flaws: the worst are too sweet, artificially over-fizzy and sulphurous. . . . If *Vinho Verde* sounds like a hotchpotch of wines with confusingly varied characters, then I’m describing the region correctly. It’s almost impossible to find a uniform style. . . . Why, then, does *Vinho Verde* rarely seem quite the same in the UK? The quality varies enormously from bottle to bottle—one minute oxidised, yellow and over-sweet, the next sharp, acidic and desperately thin on fruit. (Watkins 1998: n.p.)

If the *Vinhos Verdes* tradition seemed to represent what was wrong, the southern region of Alentejo, on the contrary, was the area that was about to pave the way for a brighter future, as Harold Heckle argued in *Decanter* in the same year, while quoting the Australian winemaker David Baverstock, of Herdade do Esporão:

...with the varieties and climate that we have we give the fermentation everything: a long maceration, add the pressings back. We still need a bit more tannin to get the results we would in Australia. Alentejo offers Old World culture with a New World approach. (Heckle 1998: n.p.)

One month earlier, Richard Mayson, a British wine writer and wine producer based in Portugal, who became one of the biggest promoters of Portuguese wines, had written the more programmatic “Single Quinta Wines from Portugal.” In this piece he stages the near future of Portuguese wines, giving a historical background that becomes an appraisal of a certain Portuguese modernity:

Much has changed since those apparently innocent days of the early 1970s. Half a century of self-imposed isolation came to an abrupt end with a revolution in 1974 and, after a short period of deeply damaging political and economic instability, Portugal re-emerged as a mild-mannered member of the European Union. Brussels set about transforming the Portuguese landscape, both literally and metaphorically. Impressive new roads were driven through the mountains and small industries began springing up. . . . Tiny tascas (taverns) selling wine in five-litre garafoes were abandoned in favour of huge out-of-town supermarkets. . . . Where 25 years ago stout women would lumber along lanes bearing pitchers of wine on their heads, today’s generation fill their shopping trolleys with bottles and drive home in a hot-hatch at breakneck speed along a brand new expressway. Although there is still much to do in the vineyards, the combination of distinctive, indigenous grape varieties together with greatly improved vinification makes Portugal a real force for the future. The structure of Portugal’s wine industry is also evolving. . . . Huge cooperative wineries built in the 1950s and 1960s may have

been state-of-the-art at the time but by the 1980s they were holding the country back. Thanks to some pretty forceful monopoly-busting on the part of the EU, power has now been handed back to the growers. So, after nearly a century of corporate body-building, small has once again become beautiful in Portugal. Helped by generous loans and grants from Brussels, small farmers who once had little option but to sell their grapes to the local coop are now coming out on their own. (Mayson 1998: n.p.)<sup>13</sup>

Richard Mayson would continue to be the best advertiser of Portuguese wines. In 2004 *Decanter* published his “Portugal’s Big Idea”:

Portugal has spent the last 20 years rediscovering its *terroir*. The Portuguese have spent the last 20 years rediscovering their *terroir*. Wines that were once anonymous blends are now becoming increasingly site-specific. Not only are there new wine regions, there are also new vineyards (single-quintas), some of which have subsequently sub-divided further to bottle wine from the best plot under a separate label. (Mayson 2004: n.p.)

Moreover, in 2005, Mayson published the book *Fifty Great Portuguese Red Wines*, and in the same year, in *Decanter*, Sarah Jane Evans wrote the article “Portugal, The Shape of Things to Come,” based on a lengthy review of Mayson’s book (Evans 2005). More recent articles in *Decanter* were mostly interested in the vast number of Portuguese wine varietals, stressing strongly the “*terroir* discourse,” better adjusted to the recent market segmentation.

From these accounts a particular representation of Portugal emerged, which aligned with the wishes and desires of buyers like the more specialized ones identified by the Monitor Group’s report. Wide descriptions of the Portuguese regions, visits and interviews to the main producers, most of them linked to ViniPortugal, were symptomatic. All these articles—which characterized the landscape, talked about food, and gave short historical references—create representations that are in line with the dominant views portrayed by the Portuguese wine promotions and by the main guidelines present in the report. Ruled by old and traditional families, this Mediterranean country was now modern. Most of the time these national wine narratives helped reinforce a certain pastoral of the South and of the Mediterranean, mostly based on the landscape, but also on the idealized features of the local populations and on the social structures defined by property and property owners; they propose a rather normative worldview that clashes with a recent rural history defined by severe poverty and radical transformations in the Portuguese countryside, namely the brutal reduction of agricultural labor (Baptista 1996).<sup>14</sup> Through the portraits proposed by wine market categories, translated into the discourse of several intermediaries, Portugal was not poor, because poverty does not sell. Portugal was exotic and at the same time safe and stable, properties that are market-friendly

and accorded neatly with cosmopolitan middle-class worldviews. All these create the necessary predictability for consumers to affectively invest.

## Contentious Markets

The guidelines proposed by the Monitor Group’s report were followed by ViniPortugal and by the ICEP, the official Portuguese body supporting Portuguese investment abroad. This effort was partially funded by the European Prime program. Two million euros were subsequently invested. The ViniPortugal Fine Wines Board was created in 2007. In its first edition, organized from February 26–28 at the Ritz, one of the most expensive hotels in Lisbon, only twenty-five producers were considered to have wines that reached the minimum standards for the UK and US markets (along with the German market, which was also included). The wines were chosen by taking the particular demands of the export markets into account and a special prize awarded to wines that had adapted to that end. Most of the jury’s members were linked to the specialized press and had a specific expertise that allowed them to deeply understand market trends.<sup>15</sup> They were keen on praising the diversity of the new wine production but, at the same time, knew that such diversity had to conform to dynamics of homogenization brought by the adoption of production techniques and by adjustments winemakers had to make in order to fit market categories and consumers’ perceptions. The art of expertise, which obviously possesses a relative autonomy, was therefore limited by market configurations and needs.

It is a simplification to suggest that this exportable wine was constructed in the offices of a consulting firm where market experts dictate the rules through which the concrete materiality of wine should be defined, and still design the conventions that outline its quality and price. But these plans, backed by producers’ associations and state institutions, and articulated with national and European policies, had an obvious political strength.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, their work of symbolic translation, of creating conventions that aim to organize what only exists tacitly, also has the power to produce collective representations and induce practices. Market policies create categories of knowledge that offer a reading of the evolving society to provide guidelines on lifestyles and to construct the image of a country like Portugal.

One of the more relevant aspects of the mediation that sustains the strategy of institutionalization of a brand like Portuguese wine in the market is the way in which, like in Roseberry’s study on coffee, it constructs classes of consumers understood as social groups prone to a certain type of behavior. This construction of



social groups, resulting from a detailed work that uses techniques common to academic research, then determines the process of institutionalization that follows, bearing on the work of several mediation instances, from the oenologist to the wine writer. Promoted in the present case by agents that hold dominant positions in the Portuguese wine field, these strategies must be evaluated in further research. If its success implies an anticipation of the consumer's choice without disturbing the notion that the choice is free, it is essential to analyze how this choice goes against or confirms the prediction of the marketing specialist. Or, in other words, whether or not the specialist correctly interpreted the classification schemes of the consumer, and how politically conformist or disrupting they could be. ■

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### NOTES

1. The processes of food certification provide good examples of these contentious political dynamics (West and Domingos 2012).
2. Jens Beckert developed his field theory in other works (Beckert 2007). On the economy of singularities see Karpick (2010).
3. This report, which was actually prepared by MarketzCustomer, the Monitor Group's market analysis division, was available on ViniPortugal's website. Porter would continue to analyze the wine market, namely from the perspective of the California's wine industry (Porter and Bond 1999).
4. In the previous two years Australian wines had increased their presence in these markets by 30–40% (Monitor 2004: 8).
5. In 2002 these types of wine amounted to 68% of the exports to Great Britain and 95% of the exports to the United States (Monitor 2004: 10).
6. In the US markets, the target was also the super-premium category. When this report was produced, the super-premium category had the value of £4.99–5.99 in the British market and \$9.99–\$14.99 in the US market.
7. Michael Porter and Gregory Bond (2008: 2) argue that science and technology were the secret of California wines, against what they called European empiricism.
8. According to market expectations, as mentioned in the Monitor Group report, Portuguese wine should be fruity (20%), red (15%), full bodied (12%), similar to Spanish wine (8%), sweet (7%), light (7%), white (6%), rose (4%), Port (3%) (Monitor 2004).
9. According to Maguire (2010: 276), "constructions of provenance are used to manage the impressions and experiences of consumers, be it through labels, displays, reviews or—most immediately—the performative labour of a wine promoter."
10. [www.winesofportugal.info/pagina.php?codNode=116962](http://www.winesofportugal.info/pagina.php?codNode=116962) (accessed March 12, 2014).
11. The importance of personal networks in the constitution of wine markets has been researched for the case of Italian wine by Odorici and Corrado (2004).
12. Widely noticeable by the role performed by famous oenologists like Robert Parker (the "parkerized wines").

13. Some of the most prominent independent growers have recently formed their own organization, FENAVI (the National Federation of Independent Growers).

14. Representations of the Mediterranean were contentious in different fields of cultural and academic production, and the modernization process narrated by wine market categories was not peaceful. Radical transformations occurred from the sixties in the Portuguese countryside, causing a population exodus toward Portuguese and European urban centers.

15. Among the jury's members were well-known wine critics and writers, such as Joshua Green (Wine & Spiritis), Robert Joseph and Charles Metcalfe, Luís Ramos Lopes (Revista de Vinhos), Rui Falcão (Blue Wine), and João Paulo Martins. [www.hipersuper.pt/2007/02/28/ViniPortugal\\_promove\\_fine\\_wines/](http://www.hipersuper.pt/2007/02/28/ViniPortugal_promove_fine_wines/) (accessed March 16, 2015).

16. How these plans were implemented in practice demands another kind of research strategy, one that unveils all the struggles that occur between different actors and rationalities in the Portuguese wine field.

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